

Exodus: Redemption, Covenant, Presence

Jonathan K. Dodson | Exodus 1:1-7 | April 17, 2021

We're in a time where people are questioning stories that have shaped them. The American Dream, the Evangelical Church, a Political party. And there are good reasons. However, the danger in uprooting from a story is that in pulling the weeds, we also pull the trees and flowers that anchor and give life to the garden of our life. We become rootless. Exodus offers roots, depth, a narrative you can sink your life into. It's not just *a* story, not even *Israel's* story, it's *our* story in Christ. NT: These are *our fathers*, their experiences for *our instruction*. Jude says it was *Christ* who led them out of slavery (1 Cor 10:1-6). So we should read Exodus like many of us read personality tests: *to learn who we are*. Want to know who you are? Join us as story unfolds Covenant (19-24) Presence (25-40) Redemption (1-18).

Names: Covenant

This is not the book of Exodus. It's actual Hebrew name, to the horror of all English teachers, is *And these are the names*. The title of the book begins with *and*. Why the strange title? Exodus introduces quite a few **names**: some great, some small. You may think of Moses, Aaron, Pharaoh (though interestingly he's not named), but the book also mentions unexpected names like two Hebrew midwives, Shiphrah and Puah, the artisans Bezalel and Oholiab. Women and artists figure prominently in this story. *These are the names*. The title appears in Genesis 46:8, [Now these are the names of the descendants of Israel, who came into Egypt, Jacob and his sons](#). 75 names follow. Who? A group of immigrants who leave Canaan and come to Egypt in search of food during a famine, Jacob and his sons. Sons who become what Exodus lists *as the 12 tribes* of Israel. The 75 will become *the 12*. It's like discovering your family line at genealogy.com. So naturally the title begins with *and*. Why? To remind us *the story continues*. The story of Exodus began in Genesis. In the closing scene of Genesis, Joseph a trafficked slave saves millions from starvation through his rise to power in Egypt. He's on his deathbed, surrounded by family. He reminds them not of what he's done but *what God promised* to Abraham. To bring his people up out of Egypt and give them a land of their own, descendants as numerous as the stars, and blessing. Land, seed, blessing *outside of Egypt*. But now they're in Egypt: fruitful, exceedingly strong! Perhaps too

much. It's likely they were too comfortable, indifferent to the covenant promises of God. Calvin suggests Israel was beginning to treat Egypt as their home, and if God had not allowed them to suffer they, "might have preferred to stay forever in their nest, indifferent, the hope of God's promise effaced from their heart." As we surface from covid, we must fight against the convenience of online life to reenter real life with one another. To not stay forever in our nests, but to emerge with the hope of God in our chests. To recognize God uses discomfort to unseat us from attachment to this world and reattach us to his covenant promises. Being a covenant people: prioritizing Sunday gatherings in person; embracing the challenge of getting kids ready for church; dedicating an evening a week to fellowship with God's people in God's Word; renewing the city. Living, not in a nest, but taking flight to put hope in *other* hearts. I think of the Magnusons. During covid they reached out to folks who were suffering, dropped off meals, sent cards, gathered with CG, prayed for people, exhorted others with the truth, all while enduring a miscarriage and disappointing news. God's hope not effaced from their hearts. The story goes back even further. *But the people of Israel were fruitful and increased greatly; they multiplied and grew exceedingly strong, so that the land was filled with them.* Israel is described as fruitful, multiplying and filling the earth *just like Adam*. Israel is cast as a 2nd Adam sent to fill the world with God's image and presence. The story must continue. God cares so much he's willing to prod them out of the nest, so we can get on with being a blessing to the nations.

God: Presence

Speaking of names, we've missed the biggest name of all. In Exodus 3 the greatest name is unveiled. A name so sacred the Jews refuse to speak it. Tending his sheep in the desert, Moses turns to see a bush continually on fire and hears a voice, *I am the God of your father, the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob*" (3:6). Now return to Egypt and set your people free. Caught off guard Moses responds, *Who shall I say sent me? (authority) God replies, "I AM WHO I AM"* (14). YHWH. It's the verb *to be* repeated twice: I am who I am, or I will be who I will be. What does it tell us about God? It's a brute fact statement. I am. He asserts his own existence, *sui generis*, unlike anyone. We can't do this. When we say, I am it's followed by something that reflects our contingency. I am Jonathan Dodson. I come from a line of Dodsons. But YHWH does not come from a line of anything. He simply and

quite profoundly *is*. I AM. What is the appropriate response? Moses hides his face, afraid to look at God (3:6). The word *afraid* is what Leon Kass calls “the central religious passion,” *awe-fear-reverence*. How’s your CRP? It seems in short supply among modern people. Why? Perhaps because we’ve become so consumed with tending our sheep, so invested in our vocations, so absorbed with the kids, and streaming services. Relentlessly trying to squeeze *awe-fear-reverence* from finite things. Moses was different, interruptible, attentive. Burning bushes would have been commonplace in a dry desert, but Moses notices this one. Why? It’s unconsumed, like God, burning-pure-existent-flame. He doesn’t shrug off the sermon, but inquires further. He turns aside from his sheep. And as he does, his life is freshly suffused with the divine. He worships. Are you interruptible? Attentive to the I AM? Or overscheduled, absorbed with everyday life? How do we cultivate CRP? By punctuating our week with moments of *awe-fear-reverence*? Waking up and setting aside work to attend to God’s word. Making time to fall on your face in prayer. Starting our week on Sundays in corporate worship and rest. Interrupting your week with CG to meditate on God’s word. Now some might object: that’s not realistic. I have a life of commitments, people and tasks. *So does God*. YHWH is not the I AM but the God of Abraham (nomad), Isaac (late born son), and Jacob (liar). He attaches himself to people. He covenants with names. He infuses lives. So while we must break away from tending the sheep, we must also return to *the sheep*. *But* Moses does not return to work as usual but *brings God with him*, his staff and his word. What would it look like for you to bring God to work? To meet him beforehand, to look for the unconsumed bush, to listen for the voice: images, promises, phrases you can take with you. Pull them out when you hit an obstacle, have a break, face a challenge. Bring the I AM into the everyday.

Exodus: Redemption

We’ve considered the Book of *Names*, a story that continues to call us out of our nests into God’s covenant promises. We’ve pondered *God*, the Presence that arrests us with *fear-awe-reverence* and goes with us. But where is Israel to go? Up and out. Joseph says, [I am about to die, but God will visit you and bring you up out of this land to the land that he swore to Abraham, to Isaac, and to Jacob](#) (Ge 50:24). Why did they need to **get out**? Their conditions

were awful, crushing slavery. Social, physical, racial oppression. God is moved by their cries, as we should be for those who are oppressed. We'll look closely next week. But Israel's need runs even deeper. Their conditions were bad because their ruler was oppressive. Pharaoh claimed the power of the sun god, Re, so to live under his divine rule was to be caught up in an idolatrous system. In a similar way, everyone in this world is caught in an idolatrous system, some suffer from racial injustice others from indifference to the I AM, but all need redemption. We need *out*. And the only way out is **up**. A redeemer released people from bondage. This is what YHWH promises, 'I am the LORD, and I will bring you out from under the burdens of the Egyptians, and I will deliver you from slavery to them, and I will redeem you with an outstretched arm (Ex 6:6). God gets them out of Egypt. Why? To get them up, into his service. He repeats over and over *Let my people go, that they may serve me* (8:1, 20; 9:1). It's the climax and half the book, the tabernacle. See, there's no middle ground. Everyone serves: either the idolatrous system or the system of redemption. How do you know where you're living? In God we face someone who is superior to us in every way, and if our response is to say Yes, but I'm better than others in this or that, then you're caught in the idol system, a life of self-worship. Looking in not up. But if you say, Yes, God you're better than me in every way and acknowledge your weakness, then you can be helped, redeemed. We have to acknowledge our bondage. You see unless you worshipping God, unless he's your CRP, then you're enslaved to something else. Job, family, a cause will take God's rightful place of worship. What do we do? Jesus comes along in Gospels and says, I am the good shepherd (lead you), I am the resurrection and the life (redeem you); I am the way (lead you). Fall at my feet, and I'll set you free. Jesus redeems us to release us, not to ourselves/idols, but into his service. Out so you can go up. But we've got to fall to our knees, to say I believe, help my unbelief. That's where we find freedom. And that is what Exodus is all about. Jesus getting you out, out of Egypt, out of the nest, out of yourself and into the joy of worship.